

Obituary: Ernest Pease Hodgkin

Ernest Pease Hodgkin, otherwise affectionately known as 'EPH' or 'Hodge', died peacefully in his home on September 23rd 1998 after a brief illness. He celebrated his 90th birthday with friends and colleagues on July 26th and the University of Western Australia acknowledged his great contribution to the development of estuarine and marine science in this State by naming the Department of Zoology's marine laboratory at Waterman in his Honour on Friday 18th of September.

Hodge was unique, both as an academic and as a person. He was born in Madagascar, where his parents were Quaker missionaries, and educated in England, taking out his degree in Zoology and Entomology at Manchester University in 1930. He married Mary McKerrow and they went together to Malaya in 1931 where Hodge worked as the Medical Entomologist, studying the habits of mosquitoes that carried malaria in an attempt to combat the spread of the disease. With the advent of the World War II, Mary and their four children were evacuated to Perth in 1941 but Hodge stayed on as a guest of the Japanese in Changi prison for a period of four years. He survived this, while many others did not, by 'keeping busy' in his own words: helping other prisoners less fortunate than himself and turning his hand to repairing the frames of reading glasses with tooth-brush handles! Hodge was always skilful with his hands and few Zoology students realised that many of the benches in the Rottneest Island field station were built by him. After the war he rejoined Mary in Perth and found employment at the University of WA in 1946 as a Lecturer in the Zoology Department. Harry Waring arrived soon after in 1948 and persuaded Hodge to write up his work on the mosquitoes in Malaya as a thesis and he was awarded a DSc in 1950 for a thesis entitled *The Transmission of Malaria in Malaya* which was published by the Institute for Medical Research in Kuala Lumpur as Study No. 27 in 1956. He was later promoted to Reader in Entomology and Vertebrate Morphology and trained generations of zoologists, myself included. He never claimed to be an outstanding lecturer but his heart was always in the subject and we all remember his startling attempts to mimic the flight of insects and his lectures on gastrulation where he attempted to show us how the developing egg involutes at the dorsal lip of the blastopore!

He retired from the University in 1973 and then underwent an astonishing metamorphosis of his own – initiating a whole new research programme on the estuaries of WA for the newly-created Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). His first task was to survey the

Blackwood River and Hardy Inlet as there was a proposal to mine the rich mineral sands deposits along the Blackwood and Scott Rivers. This, first, report of the EPA has remained a classic of how environmental studies should be conducted. Although the report recommended against mining, Hodge was always typically modest in saying that the project foundered, not because of his study, but simply because the economics at the time were not favourable. Hodge had always been interested in marine environments and became fascinated by the many estuaries that dot our WA coast. He directed the study on the Peel-Harvey estuary at Mandurah, leading to the construction of the Dawseville cut which has substantially reduced the problem of algal growth. He worked, until the day he died, at trying to understand the geomorphology and evolution of these estuaries and the suite of organisms that inhabit them. His last scientific publications – two appeared only months before he died and one is in this issue – were devoted to this topic. His greatest regret was that he would now not be able to complete the book he had planned to write on WA estuaries, tying the whole story together.

As a young student I worked for Hodge over one summer break and almost didn't survive the experience! He was up at dawn, on the reef all day long, and never bothered to eat or drink unless reminded. He loved camping on the beach and all his skills as a Scout Master came to the fore. Everyone who knew Hodge recognised in him a person of exceptional integrity and honesty, dedicated to the help and betterment of those around him. He never had an unkind word to say – even against his detractors, and there were some – and he carried into his everyday-life his deep-felt religious convictions that flowed from his membership of the Quaker family. He provided students with an example of a deeply-religious person who was neither a zealot nor a weakling. He held strong views and defended them when he needed to, and those who knew him were well aware of how firm he could be at pursuing a goal to its end. To this end he established, just before he died, a trust to foster research on estuaries and continue his life-long work. Those of us who knew Hodge intimately were privileged to have had pass through our lives such an exceptional person, of whom there are so few, and he enriched us all by his being.

[Don Bradshaw, Head, Department of Zoology,
University of Western Australia]